America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative
2022 RANGE-WIDE ACCOMPLISHMENTS
2022 was a big planning and implementation year for America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI). We set the stage for renewing and signing the Federal Coordinating Committee Memorandum of Understanding. A team was put together to begin updating the Range-wide Conservation Plan for the next 15 years, and the idea of another celebration event began to take shape. We also revamped ALRI Working Groups to tackle the highest priorities and returned to in-person Longleaf Partnership Council (LPC) Meetings. Time spent with colleagues in Pensacola, Florida, and Wilmington, North Carolina, was invaluable to fellowship and enhancing our collaborative work. I was honored to Chair the LPC during this time and work with many dedicated partners to help shape these actions.

This report highlights ALRI's achievements for fiscal year 2022 (October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022) compiled from the many accomplishments of the vast network of colleagues dedicated to this effort. Annual accomplishment reporting is a vital tool for assessing the scale of on-the-ground work and measuring progress toward meeting the goals and priorities identified by the Conservation Plan and LPC. It is a reflection on the collective efforts made by public and private partners to restore this iconic forest and highlights the benefits of longleaf to Southeastern communities.

The sections in this report include detailed acreage results of longleaf restoration on private and public lands and specific stories showcasing examples of the many individuals, agencies, and projects that collectively contribute to the success of ALRI. From invasive species management to climate considerations, there are many moving parts contributing to the goals of the Conservation Plan. If you are part of ALRI, this report celebrates your accomplishments.

Restoring longleaf pine forests is more important than ever to help mitigate the global climate and biodiversity crisis in our corner of the world. Our collective work can help improve habitat for vast numbers of rare and endemic species while also building more resilient corridors for wildlife. In addition, the management practices of these forests improve community safety from wildfires and can boost rural economies. Thank you to everyone who is a longleaf champion and part of the ALRI network.

LET’S KEEP IT GOING!

LANDSCAPE SCALE CONSERVATION SINCE 2010

In fiscal year 2022, partners across the range recorded 2.2 million acres of longleaf management activities. Since 2010, more than 21.5 million acres* of longleaf management activities have been reported translating to positive outcomes for local economies, national defense, rare species, recreation, forest resiliency, wildfire risk, clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and climate change mitigation.

1,731,407 ACRES OF LONGLEAF ESTABLISHED
17,109,531 ACRES OF PRESCRIBED BURNS
363,215 ACRES OF LAND PROTECTED

*multiple treatments applied to some acres
America’s Longleaf 2022 Report Highlights

Restoration Impacts
Prescribed fire continued a record setting upward trend in 2022 with 1.75 million acres burned, but longleaf tree planting estimates (123,304 acres) were the lowest since reporting began in 2013. The Southern Forest Nursery Management Cooperative reports a continued decline in longleaf production since 2019. Strategies are being developed by ALRI partners to reverse this trend and grow nursery capacity to advance future longleaf restoration.

Public Lands Initiatives
The Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape joined the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape, Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape, and Georgia Sentinel Landscape as the Southeast’s newest Sentinel Landscape. Longleaf conservation and restoration in this newly designated landscape will help buffer military facilities from incompatible uses and potential conflicts while also providing wildlife habitat.

Private Lands Initiatives
With the vast majority of the South’s forestland in private ownership, private forests provide many of the ecosystem services we rely on including carbon sequestration and water resources. Sustaining new and existing longleaf forests through public-private cross-boundary collaboration is vital to the past and future successes of ALRI.

Strengthening Partnerships
ALRI’s 18 local implementation teams remain a driving force for on-the-ground restoration and accomplishments. ALRI’s first local partnership, the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership, recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, a testament to the long-term commitment of its sixteen partners with a collective ownership of 1.3 million acres.
More than 20 million acres of longleaf management activities have been reported since 2010. Positive outcomes associated with local economies, national defense, rare species, recreation, forest resiliency, wildfire risk, clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and climate change mitigation are being realized due to work occurring at a landscape level. Cross-boundary and interagency collaboration between private landowners, public land managers, and natural resource professionals have been the key driver for this success. The bedrock of this initiative is a Shared Stewardship philosophy of doing the right work in the right places at the right scale. This can only be accomplished and sustained through a heightened commitment to work across boundaries with an emphasis on landscape-scale priority setting.

In 2020, Sudie Thomas, a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wildlife Biologist in South Carolina, found pixie moss at the McDowell Preserve in northern Horry County. She sent her finding to Natural Heritage Botanist Keith Bradley. Coincidentally, Bradley had been in a webinar where someone had shown a 1988 record of Venus flytraps in northern Horry County. “Keith said the aerial map and location of where I found the pixie moss looked just like the place where the flytrap occurrence had been recorded,” Thomas explains.

In late spring 2021, Thomas and Bradley came looking for flytraps. They found them – lots of them in bloom, their green stalks topped with tiny white flowers rising from the sandy floor – confirming a third known protected population of flytraps in South Carolina.

Thomas credits the protection and management efforts of the Horry County Conservation Foundation (HCCF), which owns the property, for the flytrap and other rare plant findings on the property that lies not far from the busy Grand Strand of Myrtle Beach. HCCF recognized the unique and highly biodiverse Carolina bays and longleaf savannas and accepted the land donation, placing it under a Wetlands Reserve Program easement in the early 2000s.

The tract is being restored with technical assistance from NRCS, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). With the finding of a federal At-Risk Species on site, additional federal funds can come into play through the USFWS Partners Program, The Longleaf Alliance, and the American Forest Foundation.

In 2022, HCCF received a Venus Flytrap Champion award. “This is thrilling for those of us who love this plant,” said Julie Moore, who leads the Flytrap Champion program that recognizes groups and individuals who manage flytrap habitat, which only occurs in an area roughly 60 miles around Wilmington, North Carolina.

“This is a great example of protecting habitat that results in a wonderful outcome for rare species.”
PRIVATE LANDOWNERS SHOWCASE BIODIVERSITY

By Sara Annrich, American Forest Foundation

The Payne Family Farm, just west of the DeSoto National Forest in Mississippi, features a longleaf pine forest that includes ponds, a year-round stream, and riparian areas woven through the property. The mix of habitats allows for a diversity of flora and fauna to flourish.

In May 2022, the farm hosted a bio-blitz and field day which reported a combined 306 plant, bird, fish, amphibian, reptile, and mammal species. Bio-blitz participants included the University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, and USFWS. More than 100 people attended the field day to learn about longleaf pine management, along with the importance of habitat and species diversity.

Controlling invasive species is an important management concern, and through a partnership with USFWS and the American Forest Foundation, nearly 500 acres were treated to control unwanted vegetation and further enhance the open pine habitat.

ACTIVE LAND MANAGEMENT SUPPORTS NATIONAL SECURITY

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership program unites seemingly unlikely bedfellows from the Department of Defense, landowners, non-governmental organizations, and a host of state and federal agencies to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, protect critical habitat, and enhance America’s working lands.

Northwest Florida, home to six of the nation’s most important Air Force and Naval Air installations and ranges, has already racked up considerable success since its designation in March 2022. Landscape partners have provided over $18 million to protect nearly 8,500 acres and developed forest management plans for private landowners to conserve wildlife habitat, retain working forest and agricultural lands, and protect the missions of military installations on over 24,000 acres.

The Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape joins the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape in Florida, the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape, and the Georgia Sentinel Landscape in improving longleaf pine habitat and ensuring national security.
2022 Longleaf Achievements

By Carol Denhof, The Longleaf Alliance, and Earlene Jackson, USDA Forest Service

In the 2022 planting season, 957,300 longleaf pine seedlings were planted on a total of 1,541 acres. The National Forests in Mississippi are actively restoring and managing longleaf pine ecosystems in the DeSoto, Chickasawhay, Homochitto, and Bienville Districts. Through successful public/private partnerships, the National Forests of Mississippi staff completed projects ranging from longleaf planting, Red-cockaded Woodpecker recovery, and groundcover seed sourcing.

Longleaf Establishment

The Southern Forest Nursery Management Cooperative reports a continued decline in longleaf seedling production since 2019. Strategies are being developed by ALRI partners to reverse this trend and grow nursery capacity to advance future longleaf restoration.

Longleaf thru silviculture

Longleaf tree planting estimates for 2022 were the lowest since annual reporting began in 2013. ALRI measures longleaf pine acres gained through plantings and silvicultural practices. Silviculture activities can shift an existing forest with a minor component of longleaf to longleaf dominant through thinning, prescribed fire, or other treatments.

The National Forests of Mississippi staff were recognized at the Biennial Longleaf Conference for their outstanding work.

~Million Seedlings Planted in Mississippi National Forests

National Forests of Mississippi staff were recognized at the Biennial Longleaf Conference for their outstanding work.

By Carol Denhof
Record Year for Prescribed Fire

For the second year in a row, partners set a prescribed fire record in longleaf ecosystems. More than 1.7 million acres were burned in 2022 – 54,000 more acres compared to the previous year.

Private Landowners Plant 70% of Longleaf

Longleaf planting projects on private properties are funded by landowners, often with support from financial assistance programs. USDA Farm Bill Programs assist with the most longleaf planting acres each year. In 2022, NRCS and Farm Service Agency programs helped fund 58% of longleaf planting acres and 25% of all longleaf management activities on private lands.

Mississippi National Forests

Projects like these contribute greatly to the USDA Forest Service’s Million-Acre Challenge. In 2017, the Forest Service committed to add one million acres of longleaf pine to National Forests in the southeastern United States. Just five years later, they are at 88% of that goal with more than 880,000 acres on the path toward longleaf restoration.

Photo by Andrew Kornylak

Photo by Andrew Kornylak

Photo by Andrew Kornylak

The Longleaf Alliance, and Earlene Jackson, USDA Forest Service
The Power of Partnerships

Twenty-five years ago, seven partners came together at Bear Lake Recreation Area in Blackwater River State Forest to launch the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) to restore longleaf pine ecosystems in northwest Florida and southern Alabama. Many of those same partners returned to the scene in May 2022 to celebrate the partnership’s Silver Anniversary.

More than a hundred people attended the celebration, which was highlighted by remarks from GCPEP Director Vernon Compton, LPC Chair Colette DeGarady, and Ad Platt, Vice-President of Operations for The Longleaf Alliance.

Today, 16 GCPEP partners manage 1.3 million acres in the region and three field teams assist partners with on-the-ground management including prescribed fire, rare species recovery, wetland restoration, and invasive species control.

When ALRI first formed as a regional initiative, GCPEP served as a model for public and private coordination, already making great progress for longleaf conservation and inspiring similar work in other important longleaf landscapes.

Contributed by Bonnie Stine, Florida Forest Service

Protecting Longleaf Habitat in a Fast-Growing Region

The Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project is a part of the priority Florida Wildlife Corridor and creates connectivity between Naval Air Station Whiting Field and Blackwater River State Forest. Key purchases by The Trust for Public Land and The Conservation Fund protected 7,100 acres in 2021 and 2022. Since 2010, the state has acquired nearly 10,000 acres with more planned. The lands will be managed by the Florida Forest Service and added to Blackwater River State Forest, which is the largest state forest in Florida. All this conservation is happening in one of the country’s fastest growing regions, making this a major GCPEP success story.

Contributed by Bonnie Stine, Florida Forest Service
CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE NEXT 15 YEARS

ALRI’s Conservation Plan was the first effort to frame conservation activities across the entire range of longleaf pine in a way that supports, improves, and accelerates the cumulative success and effectiveness of longleaf conservation. Under this plan, many significant accomplishments in advancing longleaf pine across the range have been achieved. Now it is time to build on that success – creating the Conservation Plan 2.0 to guide our work for the next 15 years.

Partners from across the range are involved in the development of the Conservation Plan 2.0. Our goal is to better integrate and align programs to achieve common desired conditions, gain efficiencies, and improve program delivery within longleaf forests across the range. Issues continue to be identified for longleaf pine restoration such as increasing nursery capacity, improving groundcover, developing markets, improving/increasing maintenance, and controlling invasive species.

ALRI is committed to keeping longleaf restoration on the minds of natural resource professionals and land managers across the range. The Conservation Plan 2.0 will strengthen our successes and improve our shortcomings as we gain more insights and experiences. Thank you to everyone who has provided insights in developing this new plan and to everyone who plans to implement it! You are all a part of ALRI’s success.

By Jason Dockery, LPC Chair-Elect, Alabama Forestry Commission

OPPORTUNITY & CHALLENGE

New Longleaf Tree Improvement Working Group
By Ad Platt, The Longleaf Alliance

Expansion of longleaf ecosystem restoration is currently restricted by the reforestation pipeline, but a new working group hopes to fix that situation by addressing limitations in cone production and collection; seed extraction, processing, and storage; and nursery capacity and production.

Over two dozen organizations are partnering on the Longleaf Tree Improvement Working Group to develop a long-term business plan before existing genetic resources are lost. Once characterized and understood, this resource would be available to assist new orchards for future seed production. The group is also identifying improvements to existing longleaf pine orchards and nurseries.

Photo by Randy Tate
Photo by Casey White
This past year, several partnerships worked to strengthen the connection between longleaf restoration and the ecosystem services provided by forests. A study by Clemson University with support from The Nature Conservancy and NFWF aims to provide direct measurements of net carbon sequestration by a newly restored longleaf pine forest and a mature longleaf pine forest. Three years of collected data show the levels of carbon sequestration for the mature forest and the rate of carbon release for the young forest. This study is ongoing and will be published soon.
### ACCOMPLISHMENT SUMMARY

**BY STATE**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Longleaf Establishment Acres</th>
<th>Longleaf thru Silviculture Acres</th>
<th>Prescribed Burning Acres</th>
<th>Maintenance Activities Acres</th>
<th>Acquisition/Easements Acres</th>
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**TORATION TO CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

In Nacogdoches, Texas, The Longleaf Alliance, Texas A&M Forest Service, the Texas Longleaf Team, and the Southeastern Partnership for Forests and Water hosted a forum for over 90 partners from the water utility, corporate, forestry, and conservation sectors to discuss the link between longleaf forests and source water benefits, explore the role that managed longleaf forests play in improving drinking water quality and quantity, and identify overlapping goals and conservation projects on the ground.

*By Lisa Lord, Colette DeGarady, and Tom O’Halloran*